



Public Utility Commission of Texas

THERE IS HELP FOR TEXANS STRUGGLING TO PAY THEIR ELECTRICITY BILLS **Chairman DeAnn Walker, Public Utility Commission of Texas**

According to forecasts, the 2018 summer season in Texas is expected to be hotter than average, meaning that electric bills could be higher than usual for residential customers trying to beat the heat. The companies that sell electricity directly to Texans have historically shown a strong willingness to work with customers who struggle to pay their bills, but there is a federal program that can help those who need even more assistance.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is known in Texas as the Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP). This allotment of federal dollars flows through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to their network of 37 non-profit subgrantees who work to help eligible low-income households across the state.

Funded by Congress through Labor HHS Appropriations Bill, LIHEAP is operated by US Health & Human Services/Administration for Children & Families to provide utility cost assistance up to \$1,200. Some households may also be eligible to receive additional assistance for weatherization and/or crisis situations.

According to the LIHEAP allocation formula, 10.4 million Texas households are projected as eligible for the program this year because they are making less than 150% of the federal poverty level (or \$37,650 annually for family of four). Households with seniors, persons with disabilities, or families with children under the age of 6 are given priority in the qualification process. In 2017, 2.5 million Texas households qualified, yet only 4% of those were ultimately served with CEAP. We can surely do better this summer.

This year, when Congress boosted funding for LIHEAP by more than 7% nationwide, it actually increased the allotment for Texas by nearly 30%, from \$106.7 million in FY 2017 to \$152 million in FY2018. As low-income Texans experience the higher bills during the summer cooling season, these funds could provide a critical safety net.

I strongly encourage Texans in need of utility assistance to pick up the phone and call 1-877-399-8939 to be put in touch with the CEAP administrator for their area. The desired end result is a summer remembered for enjoyable barbecues, family time and a steady supply of power.

